



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

***GRAND JURY RETURNS INDICTMENT
CHARGING NINE WITH MONEY LAUNDERING, OTHER VIOLATIONS;
Charges Follow Two-Year Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force Investigation***

SALT LAKE CITY – A federal grand jury has returned an 11-count indictment charging nine individuals, all Mexican nationals living in the Salt Lake City metropolitan area, with conspiracy to commit money laundering and other financial-related violations for their role in running a series of illegal money transmitter businesses that were allegedly used to launder millions of dollars in drug money and funnel the proceeds to accounts in Mexico and throughout the United States.

The nine defendants, including four brothers, were charged in an indictment returned Wednesday with conspiracy to commit money laundering, conducting an unlicensed money transmitting business, failure to file a currency transaction report, structuring monetary transactions, re-entry of a previously deported alien, and alien in possession of a firearm. All but three of the defendants, Jose Luis Aguilera-Meza, Adalberto Aguilera-Meza, and Veronica Moran, are in custody. A list of the defendants is attached.

The indictment alleges that, beginning as far back as 1999, the suspects operated a succession of money transmitter businesses that were used to launder proceeds from illegal drug sales. According to investigators, the defendants employed a variety of methods to mask the illegal transactions, including moving the money through local currency exchange houses and check cashing services and maintaining multiple bank accounts.

The charges are the result of a two-year multi-agency undercover investigation involving U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation (IRS CI), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF), the FBI, and local law enforcement agencies.

The probe began after investigators uncovered information that a wire transmitter business known as Envios Aguilera had been used to transmit funds belonging to a suspect in a drug investigation. Despite losing its license to operate as a money transmitter in August 2002, records show Envios Aguilera transferred

millions of dollars on behalf of its clients. Investigators believe that while some of the money being transferred was from legal sources, millions of dollars came from the proceeds of illegal drug sales.

According to J. Wesley Eddy, Special Agent in Charge of IRS Criminal Investigation for Utah and Nevada, "IRS Criminal Investigation is committed to fighting the war on drugs along with other federal, state and local agencies. Drug trafficking is a crime that revolves around money and money laundering often involves an enormous amount of financial transactions and financial outlets throughout the world. Our agents have the law enforcement and financial expertise to assist other agencies with narcotics cases by following the money."

"This case demonstrates the real threat posed by unlicensed money transmittal businesses. Any criminal or terrorist can come to these underground businesses and have millions wired anywhere in the world with no questions asked," said Joseph Romel, assistant special agent-in-charge of ICE investigations in Utah. "ICE's goal is to identify, disrupt and ultimately dismantle these underground financing and transmittal operations."

"The DEA's Utah Financial Investigative Team (UFIT) continues to find success in identifying and disrupting the flow of drug money back to the source of the drug supply. These investigations are very significant and a top priority for DEA. We can not dismantle the complete drug trafficking organization until we can identify and seize the organization's only motivator, money," said Jeffrey D. Sweetin, DEA Special Agent in Charge of the Rocky Mountain Field Division. The UFIT includes investigators from DEA, IRS, FBI, ICE, the West Valley Police Department, and the Salt Lake City Police Department.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.